GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICE: A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

This paper analyses the theme of international service (or international volunteering as it is perhaps better known in the UK) in relation to ideas about globalization and development and presents a framework for future research. Agencies such as the United States Peace Corps, the United Nations Volunteers or a range of specialised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have long promoted volunteering as part of international development work among a diverse range of servers and receivers in fields that include poverty reduction, business development, community work, environmental preservation or cultural exchange.

International volunteering - like volunteering more generally - remains an under-researched topic. We know little about its impact, changing forms and shifting meanings. This may be a very good time to move forward these agendas. On the 'plus' side, the progress of so-called globalization means that international travel is cheaper and more widely available than ever before and communications technology makes it possible to build contacts between individuals or organisations virtually anywhere in the world. On the 'minus' side, the challenges of global poverty, inequality and insecurity remain more acute than ever; and have now been compounded by various post-9/11 anxieties and, in some cases at least, a set of responses which is believed by some observers at least to be leading to declining levels of trust and respect between people - both within countries (Robert Putnam's 'bowling alone' arguments) and at the international level (Samuel Huntington's concerns about a supposed 'clash of civilizations').

Background

International service can be located within the general wider context of voluntarism and volunteering. In Europe, the evolution of volunteering can be traced back to the changing responsibilities of state and church for welfare, and the activities of charitable societies (Gaskin and Davis Smith 1997). International volunteering also has roots in the colonial period (for example, the tradition of Christian missionary service) and in the post-1945 reconstruction in Europe. After World War Two, the

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formation of the United Nations and the new framework for international development assistance - bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs, the Bretton Woods institutions - took place and continues to shape relationships between the rich and poor countries today. Another form of international service was embodied in the freedom movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movement for international solidarity led, for example, to the recruitment of volunteers from UK and other parts of the world to resist fascism in Spain (Daftary and McBride 2004).

Globalization

There is now much written in the social sciences about *globalization*. There are at least three different meanings given to the term. The first is economic - the rise and subsequent dominance and pervasiveness of free market or 'neoliberal' development policies at the global level. The second is geographical - the process of integration of a wider range of places into the world economy and the intensification of social and economic relations this has produced. The third is cultural - the growth of communication and transportation systems and the ways these impact on social life (Edelman and Haugerud 2005).

Optimists speak of the emergence of a 'global cosmopolitan society' linked to the revival of ideas and practices around civic culture (Giddens 1999). As we will see below, the promise of a global civil society is one in which alternative visions can perhaps be produced and exchanged. Pessimists, such as Amalric (2000), argue that global changes have weakened solidaristic international relationships, bringing national self-interest and individualism to the fore. Amalric calls for new approaches to the governance of relationships between the rich and poor populations around the world which go beyond the traditional formal development institutions, national frameworks and narrower understandings of market-based development models. He quotes the economist Amartya Sen (1999: 22) in support of this idea:

> A more appropriate alternative is to pose the issue of justice - and that of fairness - in several distinct though inter-related domains involving various groups that cut across national boundaries.

Perhaps international volunteering can usefully be seen as one of these 'domains' which can potentially shape such new thinking and help to 'humanize' globalization.

International development

Since its emergence after World War Two, the term *development* has taken on several different meanings, from simple understandings of progress through economic growth, to broader ideas about the expansion of 'human capabilities'. Development can be understood as both a set of ideas and a system of institutions and technologies, with a vast range of specialised agencies operating in its arenas, including bilateral and multilateral donors, governments and NGOs. Unfortunately, at the start of the twenty-first century, despite the renewed efforts to eliminate

poverty as set out in the Millennium Development Goals and some signs of progress by the UK and some other governments towards meeting the UN development assistance target of 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP), there is also considerable pessimism about both the aims and progress of development. For example, rapid increases in global inequality, the continuing spread of HIV/AIDS, conflict and famine and the increased conditions of insecurity and instability have accompanied economic growth in many areas (Gough and Wood 2004). The idea of development now divides people. For some, it is 'an ideal, an imagined future towards which institutions and individuals strive'; for others it is 'a destructive myth, an insidious failed chapter in the history of Western modernity' (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 1).

International volunteering as an arena of development activity is important because it potentially humanizes what is often left as a technical or managerial process. It can bridge the gap between the professionalized world of development experts and organizations and the 'non-specialized publics' who engage with the ideas and practices of development. Ideas about development still crucially frame the way in which people in the 'North' think about people in the 'South', and in many cases too, the ways in which people in poor countries think about themselves and the rest of the world. International volunteering can provide tangible contributions to development in the form of skills and other resource transfers, but also perhaps more importantly it can promote international understanding and solidarity.

It has become clear that popular views of development in rich countries are impoverished. People get ideas and images of development through the media, and from personal experience - from tourism, from the experiences of friends or family and in some cases by direct individual experiences through volunteering. A range of contested stories therefore make up the 'public face of development' (cf Smith and Yanacopulos 2004). The concept of 'global civil society' has in recent years increasingly been invoked as an arena in which to explore the range of issues and practices around development which are presented by organisations, networks and individuals - within a kind of 'global market place' of ideas and values. The potential for international volunteering within this framework is clear, as Smith and Yanacopulos (2004) write:

> The production of different public faces of development by a wide range of civil society and other development actors, offers the possibility of prompting shifts in the relationships that currently shape relations between north and south, such as affording opportunities beyond the traditional giver and receiver, enabling the south to better represent itself, and the framing of relationships centred on forms of solidarity (p.661)

For some observers, a neoliberal consensus around economic globalization and the belief in the transformative power of markets to reduce poverty has now begun to replace development as the dominant idea that informs global change (Lewis and Mosse 2006, forthcoming). But there are many who still see the idea of development as offering useful insights into global change processes. For example, in a recent overview, Quarles Van Ufford et al (2003) argue that development can be usefully

seen as a form of 'global responsibility' and recognised as having three different but equally important strands of meaning: (i) 'hope' in that it carries with it ideas about shaping a better future, (ii) 'administration' in that it has since the 1950s amassed a massive constellation of agencies and technologies designed to produce it, and finally (iii) 'critical understanding' in the sense that it constitutes an important and increasingly dominant site of knowledge about the world.

In an era in which many development organizations seem to have replaced the more open-ended aspirations of development with a focus simply on measurable results (such as the millennium development goals) or on quite narrow definitions of development 'manageability', such a perspective opens up a far wider view of development as a new, and morally-informed, vision of global responsibility. And perhaps these vision of development as hope, administration and critical understanding is one which can inform progress with the project of both analysing and strengthening international service. For example, the idea of development as *hope* can be related to the values and idealism of international volunteering, the idea of *administration* relates to the need to understand better its impact, and finally *critical understanding* can be related to the ways in which both individual and wider societal knowledge and understanding is generated through international volunteering. This framework is set out in Table 1 below in Section 4.

The current situation

McBride et al (2003) adopt the following definition of civic service from Sherraden (2001):

> … an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognised and valued by society, with minimal compensation to the participant

This brings clarity to the subject, but as the authors readily acknowledge, its emphasis on 'formal, intensive' forms of service excludes other less well-defined forms. Volunteering varies across cultural groups and contexts and may be informal or occasional, touching on a much wider range of related phenomenon including religious duty, political activism, international solidarity, charitable work or professional internships. Such work may also be organised by diverse types of agency - governments, inter-governmental organisations such as the United Nations or from the non-governmental (NGO) or 'civil society' sector, or in some cases from the private sector - or not organised in a formal sense at all.

'Cross-national volunteering' can now be identified as a developing movement as part of a globalising civil society (Davis Smith and Brewis 2004). Despite its relatively long existence, there has been a '… recent dramatic increase in the scale of cross-national volunteering, and the form such activity has taken' (p.1). The concept includes both international service (people sent from the home country to other countries) and trans-national service (exchange between two or more countries), as

McBride et al (2003) distinguish in their overview. An example of the latter is the North American Community Service Program (NACS) which places young people from United States, Mexico and Canada together in community development initiatives in each of the three countries. There seem to have been increases in the numbers of countries engaged in cross-national volunteering as well as in numbers involved and directions. Alongside North-South volunteering, more people now volunteer from the South in other countries of the South or in the North (Davis Smith et al 2005).

Definitions can also be extended to include new phenomena. For example, in the UK, there has been the emergence of what is termed the 'gap year' (Jones, 2004). Definitions might also be stretched to include broader forms of civic partnership and cooperation, such as that initiated by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) linking the cities of Charlesbourg Quebec with Ovalle in Chile which includes exchange programmes (Hewitt 2004).

What is certain is that both practices and understandings are changing in line with a wider set of contingent factors in development and globalization. 'Developed' and 'less developed' are questionable terms and existing assumptions are being challenged. Relations between northern NGOs and southern NGOs have been shifting for some time (Lewis 1998) and NGOs strive towards a greater equality in partnerships. Oxfam also recently brought a community worker from India to work in a run down UK housing estate (Thekaekara 2000). Some NGOs in the South have internationalised their work, such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which now operates an extensive micro-credit programme in Afghanistan. Vast areas of the world no longer fit clearly into the old maps of 'developing country' areas, such as the post-Soviet countries or the large industrialising countries such as China, Brazil, South Africa and India.

Against this backdrop, there is growing recognition of the complexity of challenges within international volunteering. Take, for example, the changes in ideology and approach evident at an organisation like VSO, one of the leading agencies in the field. In his introduction to one of the first books written on VSO's work authored by Michael Adams (1968) on VSO's first ten years of operation, the Duke of Edinburgh wrote

> The first time I heard about what was to become Voluntary Service Overseas was during a visit to Sarawak in 1959. Two or three boys, who had just left school and had a year to wait before they could get a place at university, were teaching in village schools. I thought it was a splendid idea and I remember thinking at the time that like all really good ideas it was so essentially simple. (p.7)

Visiting the VSO website today one is struck by the difference in tone and the acknowledgement that international volunteering is a diverse, highly professionalized, evolving and essentially complex activity involving a wide range of issues and different kinds of organisations and individuals:

Our approach to volunteering has changed dramatically over the years. We no longer send school-leavers - today the average age of a volunteer is 38 and most placements are for two years. We are a leading development charity with almost 2,000 skilled professionals currently working in over 40 countries. We respond to requests from governments and community organisations throughout Asia and Africa … The volunteers aim to pass on their expertise to local people so that when they return home their skills remain. Volunteers can be aged between 20 and 75 years old and must have a formal qualification and some work experience.[1]

As with research on the subject of volunteering more widely, there is a growing recognition among social science researchers and development practitioners that in the case of international volunteering the interactions involved are negotiated, multi-layered and complex to a quite surprising degree (Lewis 2001).

Issues, critiques and future research challenges

Volunteering forms part of the wider phenomenon of what Smith (1990: 279) calls the 'transnational private aid network' of organisations and individuals engaged in

… moving resources across country borders through cost-effective channels to alleviate human suffering in crises and to enable the hard-core poor in developing countries to better themselves in some significant, if limited, way.

While these resource flows are becoming more and more important, we still do not know enough, as Smith points out, about the fact that the network has both 'manifest' and 'latent' functions. The former are the publicly acknowledged goals of poverty reduction, while the latter include the sensitivities and tensions between, for example, meeting short-term needs and building long-term capacity, or between the charitable work of helping and assisting as against the more political aims of empowerment and solidarity. Smith identifies a set of myths that exist within the system which help it to operate effectively - such as the idea of specific individual child sponsorship which in reality may be closer to community level development work - these may also easily destabilise and de-legitimise it.

Within this changing system, many new themes are emerging. The professionalisation of some types of civil society organisation may have reduced space for certain kinds of voluntarism as paid staff are brought in (Clark, 2003) but perhaps opens up space for others? New technology has created ways for global campaigns to connect up more easily than ever before. For example, the landmines campaigning which led to the international convention banning land-mines in 1997 was facilitated by the existence of new information technology and the capacity of civil society organizations to make innovative use of it (Scott 2001). More globalized

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[1] http://www.vso.org.uk/about/ (accessed 19 May 2005).

thinking on joint issues and campaigns is illustrated by the 'international years' organised by UN - such as the 2001 International Year of the Volunteer. The growth of forms of voluntarism within *diaspora* communities in the West - while not new - has also increased, as networks of Africans or Indians in Europe develop new organisations and networks with which to provide support to their former home countries.

The subject of international service is sometimes presented as an unqualified good, but as Daftary and McBride (2004) show, there have been criticisms from a number of perspectives. The first is its proximity to wider political and policy processes, such as foreign policy objectives of the Peace Corp in the cold war period, or the new interest in using volunteering building tolerance between 'faith communities' following the 9/11 attacks in the US. Two other common lines of criticism are from the point of view of impact and issues of participation and exclusion. There has long been, for example, a debate about the levels of skills which make international service effective, or the level of local cultural knowledge which can best equip a volunteer to do a good job. There are also anxieties about the disproportionately high levels of benefits which tend to accrue to the server - in the form of adventure, practical skills building and informal education - as against the less positive impacts that may be apparent in relation to the served. Furthermore, there tend to be disproportionately low levels of participation of ethnic minorities and women in many of the major international service initiatives of North America and Europe.

Within the field of development, another set of criticisms is more ideological, and is concerned with its role in knowledge construction and representation. For Kothari (2003), who studied the life histories of the last generation of colonial administrators turned post-colonial development workers, development as idea and a set of practices is open to criticism because of its implication in colonial pasts. Today's development industry plays down the historical continuum between the people and practices of colonial administration and today's world of development professionals, and much development studies literature is keen to assert that development as an idea only 'began' in 1945. This has led to a sense of ongoing ambiguity about development work, as expressed by one of her informants who said

> I think, like all human endeavour, development aid is a mixture of moral responsibility, an historic connection and a shade of guilt.

Within some forms of international service, those involved are gaining forms of 'cultural capital' which may bring greater personal status and authority, social mobility and professional standing - and these need to be understood and offset against the wider impact of their work in recipient communities.

The growing practice of the young person's 'gap year' has also received a critical analysis in Simpson (2004: 690), who argues that the absence of 'a clear pedagogy for social justice' allows gap year organisations to construct and promote

… an image of a 'third world other' that is dominated by simplistic binaries of 'us and them', and is expressed through essentialist clichés, where the public face of development is one dominated by the value of Western 'good intentions'.

A form of volunteer-tourism may privilege the needs and desires of the server over the served, and act as a powerful and influential framing mechanism for the social construction of ideas about development, poverty and the 'third world'.

Table 1: A framework for thinking about research on development and international volunteering

DEVELOPMENT AS 'GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY'	VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH THEMES	EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS
'Hope'	The role of values and relationships	Volunteering and international solidarity networks Volunteering and promotion of tolerance, peace Effectiveness of campaigning
'Administration'	The nature of impact on poverty and injustice	Management of international service The development impact of volunteering on receivers and their communities The changing use of volunteers by NGOs
'Critical consciousness'	The generation of knowledge and representations	Changing public perceptions of poverty, justice and development Volunteering and individual career histories The role of development education

Table 1 sets out a possible framework for research which relates the subject of international volunteering to the three part framework for thinking about development developed by Quarles van Ufford et al (2003). The first column shows the three dimensions of thinking about development, each of which suggests a particular area of knowledge in relation to international volunteering - in relation to values, impact and knowledge. The third column sets out some possible research topics - there are no doubt many more which could be discussed.

Conclusion

The concept of 'global responsibility' - which is not new, but can be traced back to some of the earliest writings on international solidarity and volunteering - helps us to contextualise the importance of international service in relation to the twin themes of development and globalization.

International volunteering appears to be growing and may be increasing in importance as social institution. What are the implications of this? What can be learned about evolving local societies and emerging global relationships from a study of international service? Can international volunteering be viewed instrumentally to provide a useful counter-weight to international tensions and foreign policy challenges? Can it provide an effective mechanism for the transfer of skills from resource-rich to resource-poor contexts? Can it contribute positively to public and private representations of global justice and development? Can international volunteering produce 'win-win' outcomes in which both the sender and the receiver can benefit, and if so, in what measure? These questions are priorities for future research.

At the level of practice, by fostering person-to-person communication in the international arena around common themes of global justice, development and international solidarity, the phenomena of international volunteering can perhaps provide a humanizing force in the face of rapid and impersonal forces of global change.

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